

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Holland Mfg. Corp.

Chicago Manufacturing Center

Training Helps Holland Manufacturing Corporation Reduce Scrap Rates

Client Profile:

Holland Manufacturing Corporation is a niche player in the refractory shop business. The privately owned plant, located in Dolton, Illinois, specializes in high-quality, specialty fire-brick refractory shapes for molten metal and high heat industries. Since its inception in the early 1980s, the company has grown from a two-person shop to nearly 50 employees.

Situation:

Because Holland serves a specific niche, the product line demands frequent customization and a firm commitment to quality. The company depends on highly skilled employees to manage the rapidly changing product specifications. Unfortunately, one-third of Holland's workforce was not able to speak or read English. The company's owner wanted to be sure workers understood his instructions and asked the Chicago Manufacturing Center (CMC), a NIST MEP network affiliate, to design a series of English as a Second Language classes for Holland employees.

Solution:

CMC worked with affiliate organization South Suburban College (SSC) to design the curriculum and provide the classes for Holland's workforce. SSC added basic math classes to the program, as it became apparent that both the English speaking and non-English speaking workers could benefit from that training as well. The company held classes in 2001 and 2002, bypassed 2003, and have resumed them in 2004.

The process began by spending 20 minutes with each prospective student in one-on-one interviews. Based on employee feedback, SSC developed a curriculum and instructional plans. Each of the students received 42 hours of ESL classes and 39 hours of math. In 2004, the schedule remains the same, but the instructor is cognizant of the differing competency levels in class and is making adjustments as needed.

The increased employee confidence resulting from Holland's investment in workforce development training has yielded many benefits for the company. A reduction in turnover has resulted in substantial savings, scrap rates have decreased by more than 2 percent, and employees are able to take on leadership roles and responsibilities with ease, improving the quality of their work. Interestingly, in 2003--the year Holland didn't offer ESL classes--it saw increases in turnover and scrap rate. The company credits its improvements directly to CMC and SSC's ESL classes.

Results:

- * Reduced turnover rates.
- * Reduced scrap rates from 3 percent to less than 1 percent.
- * Increased worker confidence and skill sets.

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Testimonial:

"The Chicago Manufacturing Center and South Suburban College helped us get the classes going. Their instructors have done a great job teaching the classes to our employees."

David Myroup, Plant Manager